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Statement submitted by Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

"The Coalition against Trafficking in Women — a non-governmental organization working to end the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls as a vital part of realizing gender equality — urges the Commission on the Status of Women to address the trafficking of women and girls by encouraging governments to implement social protection systems and empower women and girls through sustainable development.

The majority of human trafficking victims are women and girls. While some are trafficked for the purposes of forced labour as domestic servants, in factories or in agricultural fields, most are exploited within the sex trade, particularly in prostitution. Human traffickers' prey on the most vulnerable and marginalized: women and girls who are young, mostly of colour and from the Global South, poor, homeless, of low socio-economic class or caste, who have already suffered sexual abuse and violence, often at a young age, and who lack choices and alternatives to survive. Victims' vulnerabilities compound traffickers' abilities to coerce, entice and deceive women and girls into sexual exploitation and forced labour to satisfy the demand for, respectively, prostitution and cheap or free labour for untold profits. Women and girls trafficked into the commercial sex trade suffer extreme violence and discrimination at the hands of traffickers and other exploiters, including sex buyers, while those trafficked for labour servitude are equally vulnerable to sexual violence and sexual exploitation. Comprehensive social protection systems, including social services that address gender-based violence, are essential in ensuring the protection of women and girls from human trafficking.

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Trafficking in Persons Protocol) calls for the creation of crucial social protections systems both in the prevention of human trafficking and the protection and care of its victims. Article 6 establishes that Member States must implement measures that "provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons," especially services that include appropriate housing, medical and psychological care, material assistance, education and jobs training, and legal rights counselling. Providing victims of trafficking with frontline services allows trafficked and exploited individuals the opportunities they need to rebuild their lives and helps prevent their re-victimization. Article 9 presses Member States to create or strengthen measures to alleviate the factors that make people, in particular women and children, vulnerable to trafficking. A strong social protection system focused on eradicating poverty and giving access to education and equal opportunities is key to alleviating women and girls' vulnerabilities to trafficking.

To sustain our planet, protect the fundamental rights of every human being, and ensure that no one is left behind, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). Each of the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets is "integrated, indivisible and balances the economic, social and environmental" dimensions of sustainable development. Each is distinct in its framework but equally important. Three targets — 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2 — address specific forms of trafficking in persons. Other targets focus on the root causes of vulnerability that ultimately contribute to the spread of human trafficking and call for the creation of social services to prevent these vulnerabilities.

Sustainable Development Goal five on gender equality and its target 5.2 on violence against women, in particular, recognizes that the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation is an issue of gender-based discrimination and violence. As part of comprehensive efforts to end human trafficking and achieve

sustainable development. Member States must implement national laws and policies addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation that fully reflect the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and be particularly observant of Article 3's definition of human trafficking. These measures should recognize the distinct dimensions of sex trafficking and its disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Furthermore, the clear relationship between sex trafficking and its end goal, the sex trade, including prostitution and pornography, must be acknowledged. The Trafficking in Persons Protocol and Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically mandate Member States to combat the exploitation of the prostitution of others. Under Article 9.5 of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, governments have an obligation to strengthen legislative or other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation leading to trafficking as part of its efforts to combat these human rights violations. This includes policies that will curtail demand for prostitution, which fuels the sex trade and consequently sex trafficking.

The sex trade is a cause and consequence of gender-based violence and discrimination. Women and girls are constantly seen as disposable commodities in society, and the sex trade, in particular, perpetuates this degrading stereotype. Viewing commercial sexual exploitation as a legitimate form of work hinders efforts to close global gender gaps in employment, including pay equity and discrimination. It also reinforces attitudes and practices that perpetuate sexual harassment, a persistent and pervasive obstacle for women in achieving economic independence. The harms the sex trade inflicts upon women and girls are in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it can never be a source of empowerment or legitimate employment for any woman.

Instead of normalizing the sex trade and allowing the commodification of women and girls, governments must adopt and adequately fund programs aimed at providing women and girls necessary social services, access to education, and dignified employment opportunities. This is reflected in additional Sustainable Development Goal targets under Goal 5, like that focused on valuing domestic and unpaid labour, as well as targets under other Goals, including Goal 1 on poverty eradication, Goal 4 on quality education, and Goal 8 on decent work.

If gender equality is to be achieved, the United Nations and its agencies, governments, and civil society must take action to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence and exploitation of all women and girls, including human trafficking. We urge them to create or strengthen social protection systems and implement a sustainable development plan that empowers women and girls by:

- Creating policies that address and seek to eradicate violence and discrimination against women and girls, including sexual violence.

Developing social and economic structures to combat harmful cultural practices that foster gender-based violence and discrimination and can lead to trafficking in women and girls.

- Eliminating economic practices and discriminatory policies, including poverty and discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnicity or religion, that render women and girls vulnerable to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.
- Implementing national educational curricula that promote gender equality, emphasizing the harms of gender stereotypes, sexual exploitation, sexual violence and the objectification of women and girls.

- Developing and implementing safe migration programs and providing support to migrant populations, especially women and girls.
- Promoting the adoption of policies that encourage transparent business practices, clean supply chains, and fair wages and working conditions for all employees.
- Ensuring equal and free access to education and the establishment of literacy programs for all women and girls.
- Adequately funding programs aimed at preventing violence against women and providing services to survivors.
- Adequately funding support services for victims and survivors of international and domestic trafficking and sexual exploitation, including exit programs with financial assistance, education and job training, employment opportunities, housing, medical care, legal advocacy, residency permits and language training.
- Promoting effective laws against trafficking, prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions based on gender equality penalizing the demand for prostitution (sex buyers) while solely decriminalizing women bought and sold in the sex trade.
- Rejecting government policies promoting prostitution, whether through legalization or decriminalization of the sex trade, in violation of international law.
- Rejecting the misleading term "sex work," which normalizes the abuse and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine the sex trade as a viable employer for impoverished and marginalized women.
- Calling on all Member States to ratify and implement the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.